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# The State and Society in Medieval India

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CHAPTER 3

# The Sultanate of Kashmir

*R.L. Hangloo*

Founded by Shah Mir in 1339, the sultanate of Kashmir lasted for nearly a century and a half till Kashmir was conquered by Akbar in 1586 and annexed to the Mughal empire. Shah Mir's dynasty was replaced by the Chak dynasty in 1560, a decade after Mirza Haidar Dughlat's rule over Kashmir from 1540 to 1551. The fortunes of the sultanate and its character did not remain exactly the same throughout the period. Therefore, we will look at the sultanate from the early fourteenth to the late sixteenth century in its several phases.

## I

Jonaraja refers to King Suhadeva (1301–20), the last native ruler of Kashmir, as a *rākshāsa* because of his cruel and avaricious nature. However, his reign was not markedly different from the reigns of his immediate predecessors. The landed groups in general and the priestly class in particular enjoyed privileged positions. They were free from punishment, taxation, and forced labour. A Brahman's property was not escheated by the state even if he died heirless. The people belonging to the lower strata were extremely poor due to excessive taxation; their poverty was embedded in the ecology of the region. The economy of Kashmir was dependent mainly on agriculture. The amount of cultivable land in the valley was rather limited, and the geophysical conditions of the region restricted agriculture to a single crop. The principal beneficiaries of the socio-economic and political organization in Kashmir, the priestly and the other landed groups, who had lost their legitimacy in the eyes of the mass of the people, were no longer in a position to buttress the state's authority.

During the reign of Suhadeva three people who migrated to Kashmir played an important role in its political affairs sooner or later. One of them was Rinchan who was destined to become the first ruler of Kashmir to accept Islam. Another was Shah Mir who was destined to become the founder of the sultanate of Kashmir. The third person to migrate

to Kashmir in the reign of Suhadeva was Lankar Chak whose descendants were to found the second dynasty of the sultans of Kashmir.

Rinchan had come to Kashmir from Tibet where, apparently, he was holding an important political position. He was welcomed by Rama Chand, the commander of Suhadeva's army. Kashmir was invaded and devastated by Zulchu who is said to have entered Kashmir at the head of 70,000 Mongol and Turk soldiers and horsemen. 'Chroniclers of the events of Kashmir have not recorded an event more disastrous and catastrophic than Zulchu's raid.'[1] Suhadeva fled from his capital before all the buildings of the city were burnt and the whole of Kashmir was subjected to destruction for about eight months. Jonaraja describes Zulchu's ravages in the following terms: 'Depopulated, uncultivated, grainless, and graminaceous, the country of Kashmir offered as it were, the sight of primal chaos.'[2]

The author of the *Baharistan-i-Shahi* states that Kashmir fell into a state of chaos and confusion due to Zulchu's ravages, and it took considerable time to repair the loss. The invasion had serious political implications:

> In each *pargana* villagers joined hands and strengthened their forts. They chose one among them as their leader and claimed to be independent and autocratic. They were not prepared to submit themselves to one another's authority. Although some of them did recognize the governor of the city as their overlord and sent presents and gifts to him, yet, strictly speaking, they did not observe the norms of loyalty and submission.[3]

In this situation, Rinchan raised a group of soldiers and got Rama Chand killed through a plot. His son Ravan Chand, and his wife and children were taken prisoner, and Rinchan became the ruler of the land. He bestowed favours upon Ravan Chand, giving him territory and the title 'Raina', which was later retained by his descendants. Rinchan married Rama Chand's daughter. When Suhadeva tried to return to Kashmir he was defeated by Rinchan and obliged to retreat. The government remained in Rinchan's hands.

Rinchan tried to be just to all his subjects to reconcile them to his rule. Only a few people of Kashmir had embraced Islam by this time. Influenced by a *darvesh* named Bulbul Qalandar, Rinchan embraced Islam, becoming the first Muslim ruler of Kashmir. He got a khanqah built for Bulbul Qalandar and assigned revenue-free land to it so that he could meet the expenses of his kinsfolk, his followers, and casual visitors to the khanqah, which became a durable institution. Rinchan also built a large mosque for congregational prayers, especially on Fridays. He associated Shah Mir with his government and administration.[4] During a fresh invasion of Kashmir by the Mongols after Rinchan's death, Shah Mir conducted negotiations that turned out to be successful. After the departure of the Mongols from Kashmir, he succeeded in winning the support of the local chiefs and ascended the throne of Kashmir as Sultan Shamsuddin.

Sultan Shamsuddin tried to buttress the foundations of his state by befriending the important secular elements within the local nobility and seeking their association with the administration of the state. He initiated this process by marrying his son to the local noble Lakshimaka's daughter.[5] He also chose Chaks and Magrays, the local landed elements, for manning the standing army. The other measures of the sultan included the abolition of all oppressive taxes and reduction of land revenue to one-sixth of the total produce.[6] All these measures appear to have been motivated essentially by political considerations necessary for achieving political stability. Similarly, the standing army helped the state to demonstrate its power, and to contain the growth of private power which could be directed against the state itself. Moreover, by using Chaks and Magrays for raising his standing army, the sultan tried to set these families of nobles against the others.[7] The families of Chaks and

Magrays took on the role of structuring and restructuring power relations till ultimately the Chaks would establish their political dominance.[8]

Sultan Shamsuddin ordered the *khutba* to be read and coins struck in his name.[9] He introduced and promoted the Hanfia doctrine, and created endowments for those who aided him in this task.[10] To further signify that the new state was a necessary consequence of the spread of Islam in Kashmir, he changed the *Lāukikā* calendar.[11] All these measures reveal the sultan's concern for the state to function in accordance with Islamic practices.[12] This process was carried forward by his successors.

During Sultan Shihabuddin's reign (1353–73) a large number of Sufis entered Kashmir.[13] Most of them claimed the status of Saiyids, migrating to Kashmir from various parts of Central Asia not simply because they were imbued with religious zeal, but also because they were compelled to migrate due to political circumstances. Kashmir appeared to be the right place for opportunities of power, wealth, and prestige thrown up by a new Islamic state.[14] Sultan Shihabuddin made all arrangements for the rehabilitation of Saiyids who migrated to Kashmir during his reign. They could be expected to give a definite direction to the state. In any case, the sultan granted large fertile tracts of land for the maintenance of their establishments. Saiyid Hasan Simnani and Saiyid Haidar were granted a number of villages in Kulgam pargana. Nagam pargana was granted to Saiyid Tajuddin and Saiyid Hasan.[15] The sultan also opened a number of madrassas for the teaching of the *Qur'ān*, *hadis*, and fiqh.[16]

Sultan Shihabuddin is said to have 'welded the whole of Kashmir into a single unit. Some of the defiant chiefs and lords of parganas were put to the sword and the others were brought under subjugation'. The sultan also made new conquests in the direction of Pakhli, Nagarkot, Kishtwar, Gilgit, Dardu, and Tibet. According to the author of the *Baharistan-i-Shahi*, Sultan Shihabuddin came to an understanding with Firoz Shah Tughluq, according to which land up to Sirhind came under the control of Sultan Shihabuddin. He is believed to have imposed several new taxes, and to have obliged the boatmen to render free service to the king for one week in a month. He was perhaps the first sultan of Kashmir to build a tomb for his own burial. 'Towards the fag end of his life he was infused with a zeal for demolishing idol-houses and destroying the temples and idols of the infidels'.[17]

Many Saiyid families entered Kashmir with their leader Saiyid Ali Hamadani during the reign of Sultan Qutbuddin (1373–89) and they too were allotted land. Saiyid Jamaluddin Ali got Chitar area in pargana Khourpara and Saiyid Firoz was allotted Sempora and its surrounding villages in pargana Vihi. Saiyid Kamal got the entire area of Naidkhai. Mir Saiyid Kazim was granted the area of Lethopora. Pargana Olar was granted to Mir Saiyid Ruknuddin and Mir Saiyid Fakhruddin. Saiyid Jamaluddin, who was well-versed in Islamic theology, was asked to stay in Srinagar for consultation by the sultan on important occasions.[18] Mir Saiyid Muhammad Qureshi and Mir Saiyid Muhammad Abdullah were also granted land and other facilities in Bijbehara.[19]

Besides a tomb, the sultan built a lofty palace for himself and close to his tomb developed in due course a graveyard in which many god-fearing men and saints were buried. Saiyid Ali Hamadani exercised great influence over the sultan. When he came to know that the sultan had married two sisters, he advised him to divorce one of them. Even with the second sister a new marriage was contracted from which the future Sultan Sikandar was born. Sultan Qutbuddin adopted the Muslim dress on the advice of Saiyid Ali Hamadani. The Saiyid's khanqah was founded on the site of a temple demolished for this purpose. Sultan Qutbuddin used occasionally to join the congregational prayers led by the Saiyid. The clan of Magrays rose to importance because of its chief's association with the Saiyid.

Ali Hamadani did not stay in Kashmir, but only because he felt that Sultan Qutbuddin was not propagating Islam in accordance with his wishes and aspirations.[20]

With Sultan Sikandar (1389–1413) commenced a period of permanent interaction with the people of Central Asia. Three hundred Saiyids accompanied Saiyid Mir Muhammad when he arrived in Kashmir in 1393.[21] Sultan Sikandar granted lands to them and made all the necessary arrangements for settling them in various parts of the valley. The khanqah of Mir Muhammad Hamadani in Alauddin Pora in the heart of Srinagar was endowed with several villages to provide subsistence to its inmates and for other expenses. Sikandar's reign became marked by an active participation of the Saiyids in the affairs of the state. He created the post of *shaikh ul-islam* to head the department of ecclesiastic affairs and the judiciary, and offered this to the Saiyids to enforce the shari'ah on Hindu converts to Islam. The Hindus got marginalized in Kashmir.[22] The combining of the office of the shaikh ul-islam with judicial administration had very significant political overtones. The application of Muslim law, with its notions of legal equality, could help to attract more and more people towards Islam and indeed towards the new political system. The concentration of judicial powers in the hands of the shaikh ul-islam proved to be an important instrument for exercising hegemony over the population to strengthen the centralizing spirit of the state's authority.

The author of the *Baharistan* refers to Sultan Sikandar as the 'idol-breaker'. All traces of intoxicants were wiped off during his reign. 'The clamour of the drum and the trumpet, and the shrill notes of the fife and the clarion no longer reached people's ears, except in battles and assaults.' Eminent scholars from various cities and places came to Kashmir. Saiyid Muhammad Khawari, the author of the *Khawarnamah*, wrote a commentary on the *Lum'at*. Hasan Shirazi, whom Sultan Sikandar appointed qazi, composed a work on the hadis. A large number of Sufis also came to Kashmir in the reign of Sultan Sikandar. Among them was Saiyid Ahmad Madani who came from Madina with his family and settled in the land. His tomb became a shrine to be frequented by people for the fulfilment of their desires. There is hardly any doubt about a great influx of Sufis and Saiyids during the reign of Sultan Sikandar.[23]

In the eyes of the author of the *Baharistan*, the major achievements of Sikandar related to the sphere of religion. An upholder of the laws of Islam, the sultan granted houses, hamlets, villages, and habitations to the learned, ascetics, pious, Saiyids, and qazis by way of hereditary endowments. A large number of hamlets and villages selected from each pargana were placed at the disposal of the shaikh ul-islam so that stipends and alms could be provided to the learned, the qāzis, the Saiyids, the mendicants, the needy, the pilgrims, and the travellers. The khanqah of Saiyid Ali Hamadani was endowed with a few villages. The sultan also built a hospital (*dar ul-shifa*) where medicines and other requirements were provided for patients. Physicians and other medical men were given stipends and financial assistance to enable them to attend to the sick. Besides a magnificent palace, Sultan Sikandar built a lofty and imposing Jami mosque designed by Khawaja Sadruddin who had come from Khurasan. The sultan also laid out a burial ground for the royal dead.[24]

## II

During the fourteenth century, Muslim immigrants from Central Asia and Persia brought new technologies with them, and introduced horizontal mobility and economic prosperity among the lower social groups in Kashmir. Islam emerged as the principal instrument for

consolidating the state's authority. This enabled the community of Saiyids to emerge as the new political elite in the polity of Kashmir to occupy both religious and secular space.[25]

Endowments to the Saiyids and their khanqahs, meant to provide relief for their families and followers, gave them control over land. They were fortunate enough to have fertile zones for farming; they derived income from the voluntary labour of their disciples on these lands, and also from gifts of produce from the peasants and artisans of their area.[26] With the unpaid labour of their disciples, they accumulated large fortunes. Over a period of time, the system of religious and secular grants, and the subjection of peasants and craftsmen to the grantees defined the social system within the valley. Their grants enabled the Saiyids in due course to designate their heirs as administrators in perpetuity. Gradually, the Saiyids adopted local traditions, at least with outward conformity, to build the public character of their khanqahs and estates. Their endowments were free from the exactions of the sultans and their officials.[27] Though the relationship on these estates cannot be characterized as feudal in the European sense, there were lots of constraints on the utilization of labour power. The state assumed feudal character in the sense that it primarily served the cause of surplus extraction by religious and secular elements, and did not check the process of sub-infeudation.[28] The generosity of the state in looking after the Saiyids won it their gratitude and gave them legitimacy in the eyes of the Muslim community of Kashmir. The preferential treatment given to the Saiyids cannot be attributed merely to their spiritual role; it was the direct consequence of the sultan's desire to consolidate his authority in the state and the desire of the Saiyids to ensure their monopoly of power.[29]

Evidence on the relationship of religion and the state in Kashmir is still insufficient, but there is enough to indicate that among the many considerations on which it was based the most predominant was the objective of cooperation between Islam and the state to protect and buttress each other. In order to appreciate how the religious and political roles were brought into play in the processes of state formation in the world of Islam, it is necessary to know that the ideas and institutions that developed after the death of the Prophet have persisted down to modern times with regional variations.[30] The contribution of Islam was very significant in the field of religion, law, philosophy, science, art, and literature, but the tradition handed down was not necessarily the same for all parts of the Islamic world.[31]

The efforts of the Saiyids indirectly demanded the absolute obedience of the people to the state as a religious obligation based on the Quranic injunction: 'Obey God, obey the Prophet and obey those with authority amongst you.' It was this obligation that the newly established sultanate in Kashmir came to regard as essential for the maintenance of its authority. In the course of time the relations between the state and the Saiyids became very close and complex, based on mutual needs but divergent interests. The state needed legitimacy and the Saiyids a privileged position.[32]

The great majority of the Saiyids resided in rural areas, where their establishments took roots securely, and created the social base of power for the state. In urban centres too they adapted themselves to the conditions of urban life and developed into an organization. They derived special advantages from their links with the powerful aristocracy, both rural and urban.[33] Though the Saiyids differed from the Kashmiri-speaking people in language, ethos, and privilege, they did not take much time to develop the dominant orders, such as the Suharwardi, Qadiri, and Naqshbandi, to exercise pervasive influence on the social, economic, political, and cultural life of Kashmir.[34] The importance of their role in a society stratified on social, economic, and religious bases could scarcely be underestimated.[35]

The emergence of the Saiyids as a ruling elite in Kashmir was reflected not only in the multiplication of khanqahs and the Sufi orders, but also in the functioning of the state.[36] They acted as the authoritative spokesmen of various social groups in legal, social, and religious matters. They played a crucial role in the process of social communication for social integration.[37] They led the people in prayers and on other religious occasions, and came to form a distinct stratum in the society. As guardians of a shared system of beliefs, values, and practices, they penetrated the whole society, performing varied functions and attracting various degrees of public respect and allegiance.[38]

Saiyid Ali Hamadani of the Suharwardi order tried to set the pattern for his order. Its members were avowedly prepared to die for their convictions. They opened the way for the application of Islamic tenets in the offices of the sultanate.[39] Asserting the importance of the members of his order, he justified the necessity of recourse to Islamic precedents and the sharia.[40] The pre-Islamic social and religious life of Kashmir was an anathema to Saiyid Ali Hamadani and his devoted disciples. In their eyes it militated against the Islam of the Prophet and the pious Khalifas. They were anxious to free the Muslims of Kashmir from the residual features of their Hindu life. Saiyid Ali took upon himself the task of transforming Kashmir. He first preached true Islam to Sultan Qutbuddin, both by precept and example; his sway over the mind of the sultan was complete. He collected important rules of the sharia for the guidance of the sultan and appointed his trusted disciples as his religious mentors. He made a gift of his *kulāh-i mubārāk* (auspicious headgear) to the sultan and blessed his progeny with long life.[41] The Saiyids sought official positions in civil and judicial administration to promote their own interests. The prospect of getting land and offices was their one unifying principle. They were concerned with masses because he who could win the people's support, or claim their allegiance in any particular area, could also claim corresponding prominence in the sultan's court.[42]

Sultan Sikandar appears to have worked under the impression that a true sultan was what he was, not by his own will, but by the grace of the Saiyids who could influence the public for consent to his rulership. The exercise of authority by the Saiyids could play a great role in perpetuating his sovereignty because their authority in the functions of the state could be seen as the fulfilment of divine precepts.[43] The Saiyids themselves emphasized that promotion of Islamization was necessary for the extension of the authority of the sultan in society. The validation of his claim to sovereignty depended on his acceptance of their advice for dealing with the affairs of the state.[44] Sultan Sikandar perhaps felt that Islam was the only basis of political unity and the spread of Islam at the hands of the Saiyids constituted his main claim to the loyalty of his subjects. The stability of the state thus appeared to be linked with Islam and its acceptance by the majority. The Saiyid migrants kept on penetrating rural and urban society not only with new religious messages, but also with new ideas and techniques of craft production. They controlled the socio-economic life of the rural poor and retained control over a large portion of cultivable waste in areas like Vihi, Nagam, Sempora, Tral, Nunwaani, Chitar, Avantipora, Naidkhai, Martand, Bijbehara, Khourpara, Lar, Pakh, Vachi, Soura, Kulgam, and Biru.[45] Social status, wealth, and respect were available to them as a landed aristocracy enjoying state patronage.[46] Their influence in the secular areas of the state's functioning helped them develop an effective coordination of action and orderly allocation of their spheres of political influence. No official, even if he desired, could stand aloof. He had either to resign himself to official inactivity or to act according to the instruction of the Saiyids to retain his official position.[47]

Even at the rural level the Saiyids overshadowed the non-Saiyid nobles. Both derived their strength from the village extraction, but the Saiyids had assumed more extensive and

arbitrary powers by settling disputes, divorces, and punishments, and by presiding over various socio-religious occasions as qazis, *muftis*, or *imams*, being well versed in Muslim theology, though at times unfamiliar with local traditions.[48] Moreover, a wide network of inter-family relations among the Saiyids provided readymade machinery for arbitration of disputes, which would have otherwise been referred to the court of the sultan.[49] The Saiyids worked for the sultans to extract a price for their cooperation to increase their own power, wealth, and prestige.

Under Sultan Sikandar the Saiyids sought a clear mandate from him to deal with all matters. Their influence led to a series of civil strife, which the sultan was forced to put down with a strong hand. Sikandar's reign was one of the critical periods in the history of Kashmir. His contemporary chronicler, Pandit Jonaraja, does not dwell on his reign objectively or with critical appreciation. The iconoclasm of Sikandar seems to have shocked him more than anything else in the state. He failed to notice the ideological significance of the measures of the sultan who was vigorously trying to establish firm foundations in the state with the help of the Saiyids. The persecution of Hindus and destruction of their religious establishments highlighted the interdependence of Islam and the state. To generate political stability for the sultanate, Islam needed a coercive arm where persuasion did not work.[50] By the end of Sikandar's reign the Saiyids had become so powerful that they dominated both the secular and the religious jurisdiction of the state and society, and exercised something of a politico-cultural hegemony. Their ambition soon led to competing alliances, each drawing recruits from several social levels of power, prestige, and wealth, to grab political power.[51]

Zutshi remarks that in 'the sweep of his religious enthusiasm enforced by exhortations of religious fanatics, Sikander was carried off his balance and committed excesses against non-Muslim subjects'. There was a widespread confusion in their ranks, and it became worse under Ali Shah (1413–19) who perpetuated atrocities of a greater magnitude, but failed to restructure government after the Islamic fashion, for he was a weak and inefficient ruler.[52]

## III

In the reign of Sultan Ali Shah the Saiyids joined hands with his prime minister, Saifuddin (Suha Bhatta before his conversion to Islam), to extract taxes and to coerce the subjects of the sultan.[53] Ali Shah became totally ineffective when Mir Qaisar led the Saiyids in directing the apparatus of the state for their personal ends. They threw Kashmir in a state of confusion by violating the wives of Kashmiris, subjecting them to all sorts of oppression. Even the sultan's property was not spared. According to Jonaraja, lofty homes, excellent houses, fine dresses, large gems, and all that adorned the king were now wrested by the *yavanas* (foreign Muslims).

With the emergence of the Saiyids as the ruling elite, the non-Saiyid elements in the nobility found their spheres of interest curtailed, their positions challenged, and their power threatened. The domination of the Saiyids was seen by them as a threat to their very survival.[54] However, both the Saiyid and the non-Saiyid nobility had political goals that set them at odds with the state. Therefore, the state was weakened in proportion to the increase in the power of the Saiyids. Sultan Ali Shah lost the ability to rule.[55] The crisis at this stage was halted by Shahi Khan, popularly known as Zain ul-Abidin.[56]

In his efforts to strengthen his claims to capture power, Zain ul-Abidin (1420–70) depended on the non-Saiyid nobility. He entered into an alliance with Thakurs and other

local chiefs of southern Kashmir to wrest power from his rival claimant Yusuf Khan, who was defeated and killed at the *idgah* in Srinagar in 1418.[57] Zain ul-Abidin tried to evolve strong and coherent traditions to strengthen the state. He never allowed the Saiyids to grab dictatorial powers in his court. He did not hesitate to expel Saiyid Mak when the latter ignored the sultan's abrogation of certain taxes that some of Saiyid Mak's followers used to collect from non-Muslim subjects for using the cremation ground.[58] He put up the semblance of a Muslim ruler by seeking recognition from the Abbasid Caliph of Egypt as the legal basis of his authority in the eyes of Islamic orthodoxy and by calling himself Amir ul-Muminin.[59] He recognized the existence of Zimmis in his kingdom and realized jizya, but its rate was drastically reduced and it was never actually collected.[60] Zain ul-Abidin used the post of the shaikh ul-islam for the enforcement of the sharia in his dominions, but he never allowed his own decisions regarding the state and society to be influenced by the shaikh ul-islam.[61]

Sultan Zain ul-Abidin was politically liberal and looked upon the Saiyids as the most obvious brake on the affairs of the state. An elaborate administrative system and a strong standing army were essential for strengthening the basis of his power, and this was not possible without the participation of the non-Saiyid nobility in the affairs of the state. He felt more and more concerned for rebuilding their identity. Tilka Acharya was one of the most important officials of the sultan.[62] Jaya Bhatta was his treasurer, while Shriya Bhatta and Ganapati Gaurak manned the judicial administration. Malik Autar Chand was the commander of the army and Kanch-Dammara was the city prefect.[63] The other important nobles at his court were Nothsoma, Yodha Bhatta, Avtar Bhatta, Darya Khan, Shaikh Nuruddin, Mulla Qazi Khan, Mulla Kabir Kashmiri, Sita Kantha, Siva Bhatta, Mansur bin Muhammad, Pandit Srivara, Mulla Ahmad Kashmiri, Mulla Nadri, Pandit Jonaraja, Karpura Bhatta, Rupya Bhatta, Sinha, Rajanak, Rig, Abmanyu, and Jamil Hafiz, among others.[64]

In a very little time he rationalized and reformed the administration and put new vigour into the fiscal system. To ensure adequate economic surplus for the state, he took immense interest in agricultural production and expansion. Srivara, the contemporary chronicler of the sultan, quotes him: 'For the love that I have for my subjects I have augmented the production of my country three-fold with the help of canals, and extended cultivation by other means.'[65] The promotion of crafts like metalwork, woodwork, woodcarving, papier mache, carpet-weaving, book-binding, stone-polishing, bottle-making, goldbeating, window-cutting, and various other activities brought new foreign forms of craft and manufacture to the state.[66]

For importing new designs and skills, the sultan invited artists from Sijistan, Iraq, Samarkand, Herat, Khurasan, Gilan, Balkh, Bukhara, Gujarat, and various other parts of the world.[67] The relations with these countries were not limited to exchange of periodic gifts. A widespread foreign influence on people of Kashmir opened a new phase of development in the technology and economy. Zain ul-Abidin's reign saw the emergence of new towns that grew into regional metropolises with the concentration of officials, merchants, craftsmen, and a high level of commercial activity. In the course of time there emerged new economic elite that aspired for political power.

In his attitude towards the neighbouring regions, Sultan Zain ul-Abidin did not concentrate on mighty military activities against them for he felt that the political existence of small regions was necessary so long as they did not grow in wealth and power to challenge his own supremacy. He had no desire to dissolve them. His relations with Jasrat Khokhar and the feudatories of Jammu, Naushera, Rajauri, Lohara, Ladakh, and Kishtwar clearly

indicate that his attitude towards them had an ideological underpinning for political pluralism under the umbrella of the sultanate.[68]

Sultan Zain ul-Abidin concentrated on various aspects of education, culture, and craft production as the primary mechanism to maintain order in society and to create a social basis of his power with secular infrastructure. 'Zain-ul-Abidin was in theory the head of an absolute monarchy concentrating all executive, legislative and judicial powers in his hands. But in practice he was a kind and benevolent ruler and his rule was an enlightened autocracy.'[69] He patronized men of learning and learned men of great repute flocked to his court from foreign lands. They received lavish gifts and favours from the sultan and settled in Kashmir. He collected a large number of genuine and rare books for the royal library, including a rare copy of the *Kashshaf*. The courtiers as well as the men of learning of his time were experts in the art of versification and subtle in discourse. The sultan himself possessed a poetic sensibility and was adept at writing verses under the pen-name of Qutb. A number of famous saints flourished during his reign. 'In short, he was a ruler who did his utmost for the progress and prosperity of his subjects; who took keen interest in the rehabilitation and building up of the state; whose benevolence and munificence prompted artists and craftsmen to gain excellence in their skills.'[70]

An important aspect of the reign of Sultan Zain ul-Abidin was his attitude towards the non-Muslims. They were allowed complete freedom of worship and some of the temples destroyed in the earlier reigns were rebuilt. Some of the people who had gone to Jammu and Kishtwar because of the policies of the earlier sultans were induced to return to Kashmir. Patronage was extended to the learned among the Hindus and the sultan himself attended many of their festivities and 'distributed gifts among dancers, stage actors, musicians and women singers so that all people, high and low, found themselves happy and satisfied with him'. Significantly, the author of the *Baharistan* looks upon Zain ul-Abidin's attitude as a conspicuous defect and an overall drawback, regretting that idolatry and heresy, which had been stamped out by Sultan Sikandar, were revived by him. Understandably, the community of infidels and heretics called him the 'Great King' (*bādshāh*), and he came to be known by this name throughout his kingdom.[71]

Stability of the state was achieved by Sultan Zain ul-Abidin by balancing the power of the Saiyid and non-Saiyid nobility. Among the latter were both Hindus and Muslims of Kashmir. But this stability lasted only for a short period. After his death in 1470, the state in Kashmir lost its hegemonic character because of the ceaseless struggle of the Saiyids and the rival factions of the local nobility for dominance, which gradually pushed the state and society in Kashmir into a vortex of economic and social collapse.

## IV

The sultanate of Kashmir began to decline after the death of Sultan Zain ul-Abidin. He was succeeded by his son Haidar Shah who ruled for a few years and was succeeded by his son Sultan Hasan Shah. Hundreds of Indian singers, both men and women, were inducted by Hasan Shah in his service, in addition to the Kashmiri musicians, singers, and instrumentalists employed in his household. The affairs of the state were managed by Malik Ahmad Itoo, Sehej Raina, and Ahmad Magray. Some of the outlying areas of Kashmir were lost by the sultanate due to mutual feuds and in-fighting among the nobles of Kashmir. The reign of Sultan Hasan Shah is also known for the arrival of Shamsuddin Iraqi and his residence

in Kashmir for a number of years. On Hasan Shah's death, his son ascended the throne at the early age of seven as Sultan Muhammad Shah.[72]

Sultan Muhammad Shah had a long and chequered reign. In its early part the control of the government was in the hands of the Saiyids of Baihaq, led by Saiyid Hasan. He looked upon the Kashmiri chiefs and commanders as 'not a bit higher than his servants and attendants'. He proclaimed that public affairs would be managed strictly according to the sharia. He promised to abide by the commands of the *Quran* while dealing with the matters of the state. The Kashmiri chiefs found it difficult to adjust themselves to the authority of Saiyid Hasan and he was murdered along with a number of his brothers and nephews. His son Mir Muhammad retaliated but eventually, a truce was concluded. Mir Muhammad returned to India and administrative authority now rested in the hands of Ahmad Magray. The reign of Muhammad Shah was marked by factional struggle among the nobles of Kashmir in support of the sultan, his uncle Fateh Shah, or his son Ibrahim. The individuals who played some role in this situation on one side or the other were Malik Shams Chak, son of Helmet Chak, Malik Nauroz Itoo, son of Ahmad Itoo, Husain Chak, son of Pandav Chak, Malik Saif Dar, Malik Musa Raina, Malik Shankar Raina, Jahangir Padar, Malik Kaji Chak, Sayyid Muhammad Baihaki, Malik Bahram Dar, Shamsuddin Iraqi, Ibrahim Magray, and Malik Usman. Not all of them survived the reign of Sultan Muhammad Shah.[73]

The author of the *Baharistan-i Shahi* appreciates the role of Malik Musa Raina and Shamsuddin Iraqi when the former held the reins of administration. Under the guidance of Shamsuddin Iraqi, he enforced the laws and religious tenets of Islam so that 'the pure religion of Muhammad and the prosperity of the Muslim community reached the highest pinnacle'. With the support of Malik Musa Raina, Shamsuddin Iraqi undertook a wholesale destruction of temples and construction of mosques in their place. As the author of the *Baharistan* puts it, 'During his lifetime with the virtuous efforts and elaborate arrangements made by the fortunate Malik Musa Raina, 24,000 staunch infidels and stubborn heretics were ennobled by being converted to the Islamic faith.' After Sultan Sikandar, none among the Muslims who wielded authority over Kashmir rendered so much service to Islam as Malik Musa Raina.[74]

Muhammad Shah was succeeded by his son Sultan Shams Shah who was succeeded by his brother Ismail Shah. They ruled only for a few years when Malik Kaji Chak was the administrative head. Ismail Shah was his son-in-law and remained only a titular king. His authority was limited to the striking of coins and reading of the khutba in his name. Malik Kaji Chak held absolute power during his reign. 'This was a time when Islamic religion and the customs of this faith reached the heights of its glory.'[75]

The rulers of Delhi had begun to take interest in the affairs of Kashmir by the beginning of the sixteenth century. Sikander Lodi, for example, helped Sultan Muhammad Shah to regain his throne, which had been occupied by his uncle Fateh Khan. Babur helped Fateh Khan's son Sikandar, though he failed to gain any influence in Kashmir. When Muhammad Shah was dethroned in 1525 and his son Ibrahim was raised to the throne, the supporters of Muhammad Shah invoked the aid of Babur and placed Muhammad Shah back. The discontented party approached Kamran to conquer Kashmir. The cruelty of his soldiers drove the Kashmiri factions into a temporary union that was strong enough to beat him back

Some of the Chak and Magray chiefs, who were dissatisfied with the ascendancy of Malik Kaji Chak, approached Humayun in 1540 to invade Kashmir. With his approval, Mirza Haidar Dughlat invaded Kashmir, occupied it without much resistance, and got the

khutba read and coins struck in Humayun's name. Malik Kaji Chak approached Sher Shah for help. He sent Husain Khan Sherwani with a handful of troops to assist Kaji Chak. But this expedition on behalf of Ismail Shah ended in failure. A similar attempt in the time of Islam Shah also failed. Mirza Haidar was able to establish friendly relations with Islam Shah. Saiyid Ahmad Majzub, a Nur Bakhshi leader, came to Kashmir and Mirza Haidar outwardly expressed faith in the Nur Bakhshia order but inwardly bore enemity towards it. Dealing successfully with the recalcitrant Regi Chak and Idi Raina, Mirza Haidar revealed his animosity towards the Shias. 'His rabid fanaticism and deep seated malice touched such proportions that he issued an order to destroy the holy khanqah of Mir Shamsuddin Iraqi and started killing Muslims and the faithful.'[76] Hazrat Rishi and Shaikh Daniyal suffered death.

Soon afterwards Mirza Haidar received the news of a revolt in Tibet. In his expedition against the rebels, he sustained a fatal blow and died. Malik Idi Raina installed Nazuk Shah as sultan of Kashmir, retaining all power in his own hands. But he died after a year to be replaced by Malik Daulat Chak who rebuilt the khanqah of Shamsuddin Iraqi that had been destroyed by Mirza Haidar. A few villages were earmarked for the maintenance of Iraqi's descendants out of the old endowments, and the khanqah began to be frequented by the Shias. Malik Daulat Chak revived the Hamadani order too and extended support to Baba Hasan to build a khanqah. He brought Sufis of the Hamadani order to his khanqah from different parts of Kashmir to revive the practices of the order and the Nur Bakhshia sect. At the same time, he proclaimed that 'all citizens and aliens were free to profess any faith they wished and that no one could either dictate or obstruct others in this matter'.[77] Nevertheless, Kashmir was hopelessly divided under nominal rulers who were made and unmade in quick succession. Five kings ruled over Kashmir in eight years before the Shah Mir dynasty lost the throne finally to Ghazi Khan Chak in 1560. Shortly afterwards he transferred power to his brother, Husain Khan, who was succeeded by his brother Ali Shah.[78]

Akbar's relations with Sultan Husain Shah and Sultan Ali Shah were not unsatisfactory. In 1572 Prince Salim was married to the niece of Ali Shah who proclaimed Akbar as the sovereign of Kashmir in public prayers. On Ali Shah's death in 1578–79, his son Yusuf ascended the throne, but a civil war broke out and Yusuf was obliged to seek Akbar's protection. The emperor despatched Man Singh for his assistance in 1580. The Kashmiris sued for peace, but requested Yusuf to come alone. He slipped away without informing Man Singh and seated himself on the throne. In 1584 he was asked to come to the Mughal court and pay homage to the emperor but instead of coming personally he sent his son Haidar first and then his elder son Yakub. This did not satisfy Akbar. In 1585 Yakub fled from the imperial camp, and Akbar sent an order for Yusuf to come in person or to send Yakub to the court. Yusuf did not comply, and Akbar deputed Prince Shahrukh and Raja Bhagwan Das to invade Kashmir. After a well-contested but indecisive battle, Bhagwan Das was able to persuade Yusuf to come to his camp. However, the Kashmiri nobles placed Yakub on the throne. Bhagwan Das was in a critical position and felt obliged to patch up with him. According to the terms of this agreement, the khutba and coins were to bear Akbar's name, and the dues from saffron, shawls, and the mint were to be sent to the imperial treasury. Akbar refused to recognize this treaty and, meanwhile, Yakub ordered the khutba to be read and coins struck in his own name.[79]

Akbar decided to conquer Kashmir. He sent Qasim Khan to deal with Yakub who had now assumed the title of Shah Ismail. Unfortunately for him, Yakub's policy had revived the fanaticism of Shias and Sunnis, and alienated some nobles. The Mughal troops reached Srinagar in October 1586 and got the khutba read in Akbar's name. Yakub fled

from Srinagar to continue his opposition. Qasim Khan was replaced by Mirza Yusuf who finally compelled Yakub to surrender in 1589. He was pardoned and given a mansab of 500 with a small jagir in Bihar.[80] The sultan of Kashmir who refused to compromise his sovereignty was obliged at last to become a mansabdar of the Mughal empire.

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3 Ibid., pp. 31–2.
4 Ibid., pp. 20–3.
5 Jonaraja, *Rajatarangini* (Sanskrit) (English translation by J.C. Dutt) (3 vols.) (Calcutta: 1872 [reprint 1990]), vol. III, pp. 26–7; Muhammad Qasim Firishta, *Tarikh-i Firishta* (Persian) (English translation by John Briggs as *History of the Rise of Muhammadan Power in India till the Year 1612* (4 vols.) (1829), vol. IV, p. 455; Nizamuddin Ahmad, *Tabaqat-i Akbari* (Persian) (English translation by B. Dey and B. Prashad) (3 vols.), (Calcutta: 1927), vol. III, p. 638.
6 Firishta, *Tarikh-i Firishta*, pp. 453–5.
7 The polity of Kashmir before the establishment of the sultanate was marked by the role of the Dammaras, Ekangas, and Tantrins in the power relations of the state. It is most likely that Shah Mir, who had served the state earlier, fully understood the growing political aspirations of the Chaks and the Magrays, and the ineffectiveness of others, and therefore offered them roles corresponding to their dominance in society.
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